

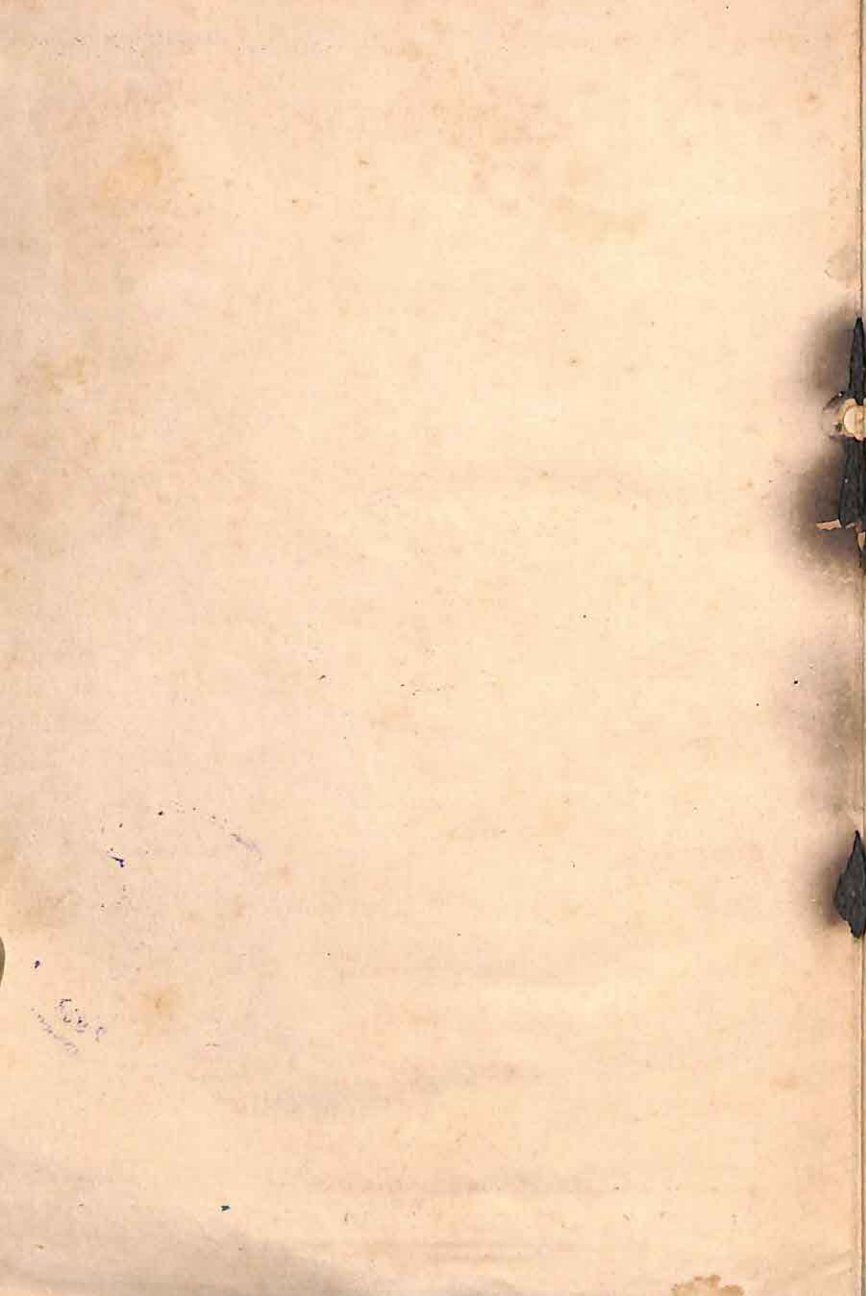
The Concept of Basic Education

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of India are keenly interested in promoting the pattern of Basic education in the country and have adopted a number of measures for this purpose. These include programmes of expansion as well as steps to improve the quality of work in Basic schools and their methods and techniques. If this objective is to be achieved, it is essential that all those who work in the field should have a clear concept of what Basic education means and should be able to distinguish between its essential features and what are mainly matters of detail to be adjusted in the light of local needs and developing experience.

This Statement about the Concept of Basic Education, which has been prepared by the Basic Education Standing Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education, is meant to highlight its significant features and to remove possible misunderstandings. I hope our educationists will ponder over it and try to work out the Scheme in the spirit that it envisages, so that Basic education may play its proper role in inculcating the right attitudes and ideals of character and efficiency in our children.

A. K. Azad

The Concept Of Basic Education

The term 'Basic Education' has been interpreted—and sometimes misinterpreted—in a variety of ways. This is, to some extent, understandable because it is a comparatively recent development and its concept and technique are still in the making. It seems necessary, therefore, to state clearly what is meant by Basic education.

Broadly speaking, it may be stated that the concept of Basic education is the same as defined in the Report of the Basic National Education Committee (the Zakir Husain Committee) and elucidated by the Central Advisory Board of Education. It is clear that the basic principles and techniques, as made out in that Report, should guide and shape educational reconstruction in India. So far as the provision of eight years of compulsory universal schooling and the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction are concerned, there is now no difference of opinion about them. They have come to be universally accepted and need no further elucidation, except in so far as it may be necessary to stress the intrinsic wholeness of the entire period of Basic education, covering the Junior as well as Senior Basic grades. The other

implications and features of Basic education that need to be clarified and stressed are the following :—

1. Basic education, as conceived and explained by Mahatma Gandhi, is essentially an education for life and, what is more, an education through life. It aims at creating eventually a social order free from exploitation and violence. That is why productive, creative and socially useful work in which all boys and girls may participate, irrespective of any distinction of caste or creed or class, is placed at the very centre of Basic education.

2. The effective teaching of a basic craft, thus, becomes an essential part of education at this stage, as productive work, done under proper conditions, not only makes the acquisition of much related knowledge more concrete and realistic but also adds a powerful contribution to the development of personality and character and instils respect and love for all socially useful work. It is also to be clearly understood that the sale of products of craft work may be expected to contribute towards part of the expenditure on running the school or that the products will be used by the school children for getting a midday meal or a school

uniform or help to provide some of the school furniture and equipment.

3. As there has been controversy and difference of opinion regarding the position of craft work in Basic schools, it is necessary to state clearly that the fundamental objective of Basic education is nothing less than the development of the child's total personality which will include productive efficiency as well. In order to ensure that the teaching of the basic craft is efficient and its educative possibilities are fully realised, we must insist that the articles made should be of good quality, as good as children at that stage of their development can make them, socially useful and, if necessary, saleable. The acquisition of skills and the love for good craftsmanship have deeper educative significance than merely playing with the tools and raw materials which is usually encouraged in all good activity schools. This productive aspect should in no case be relegated to the background as has been usually the case so far, because directly as well as indirectly, efficiency in the craft practised undoubtedly contributes to the all-round development of the child; but on the other hand, never should the productive aspect be allowed to take precedence over the educational aspect. It sets up before children high standards

of achievement and gives them the right kind of training in useful habits and attitudes like purposeful application, concentration, persistence and thoughtful planning. While it may not be possible to lay down specific targets for productivity at this stage, it should be the teacher's endeavour to explore its economic possibilities fully with the emphatic stipulation that this does not in any way conflict with the educational aims and objectives already defined. However, it has to be stated that, in the upper classes of Junior Basic schools and in the Senior Basic schools, it should not be difficult for States to lay down certain minimum targets of production in the light of carefully assessed experiences.

4. In the choice of basic crafts which are to be integrated into school work, we should adopt a liberal approach and make use of such crafts as have significance from the point of view of intellectual content, provide scope for progressive development of knowledge and practical efficiency. The basic craft must be such as will fit into the natural and social environment of the school and hold within it the maximum of educational possibilities. The idea that has been wrongly created in the minds of some people that the mere introduction of a craft in a school, e.g., spinning, can make it a

Basic school does grave injustice to the concept of Basic education.

5. In Basic education as, indeed, in any good scheme of education, knowledge must be related to activity, practical experience and observation. To ensure this, Basic education rightly postulates that the study of the curricular content should be intelligently related to three main centres of correlation viz., craft work, the natural environment and the social environment. The well-trained and understanding teacher should be able to integrate most of the knowledge that he wishes to impart to one or the other of these centres of correlation, which form the important and natural foci of interest for the growing child. If, therefore, in the Junior Basic stage he is not able to do so, it either means that he lacks the necessary ability or that the curriculum has been burdened with items of knowledge which are not really important and significant at that particular stage. It should also be realised, however, that there may be certain items in the syllabus which cannot be easily correlated directly with any of the three above centres. In such cases, which should occur only infrequently, there should be no objection to these being taught according to the methods of teaching adopted in any good school.

This means that even in the case of such lessons, the principle of interest and motivation and the value of expression-work will be utilised. In any case, forced and mechanical 'associations' which pass for correlation in many schools should be carefully avoided.

6. The emphasis on productive work and crafts in Basic schools should not be taken to mean that the study of books can be ignored. The Basic scheme does postulate that the book is not the only or the main avenue to knowledge and culture and that, at this age, properly organised productive work can in many ways contribute more richly both to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of personality. But the value of the book, both as a source of additional systematised knowledge and of pleasure cannot be denied and a good library is as essential in a Basic school as in any other type of good school.

7. The Basic scheme envisages a close integration between the schools and the community so as to make education as well as the children more social-minded and cooperative. It endeavours to achieve this, firstly, by organising the school itself as a living and functioning community—with its social and cultural

programmes and other activities—secondly, by encouraging students to participate in the life around the school and in organising various types of social service to the local community. Student self-government is another important feature in Basic education which should be envisaged as a continuous programme of training in responsibility and in the democratic way of living. In this way, the Basic school not only helps in cultivating qualities of self-reliance, cooperation and respect for dignity of labour, but also becomes a vital factor in the creation of a dynamic social order.

8. Basic education should no longer be regarded as meant exclusively for the rural areas. It should be introduced in urban areas as well, both because of its intrinsic suitability and also to remove the impression that it is some inferior kind of education designed only for the village children. For this purpose, necessary modifications may have to be made in the choice of basic crafts for urban schools and even in the syllabus but the general ideals and methods of Basic education should remain the same.

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